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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0945
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2954
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2339
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000667

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SUBJECT: MUTED KYRGYZ REACTION TO FUEL JETTISONING INCIDENT

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Classified By: A/DCM Robert Burgess, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. On June 21, a KC-135R Stratotanker aircraft from Manas Coalition Airbase experienced an in-flight emergency that resulted in the jettisoning of fuel prior to returning to Manas for a safe landing. Approximately 54,000 pounds of fuel was dumped at an altitude of over 21,000 feet above ground level in a mountainous area east of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan. The Ambassador and Manas Airbase leadership informed Kyrgyz government officials of the incident on June 23, and the Base issued a detailed press statement subsequent to informing the government. While the Foreign Minister reacted angrily and suggested that the U.S. should offer to compensate Kyrgyzstan for the damage, other Kyrgyz officials have reacted more calmly. The media reporting has been mostly fact-based, drawing from the Airbase's press release. End Summary.

Plane Dumps Fuel in Emergency Situation

¶2. (SBU) On June 21 at approximately 1920 local time, a KC-135R Stratotanker assigned to the Manas Coalition Airbase experienced a critical loss of cabin pressure, followed by smoke and fumes in the cockpit. This situation occurred about an hour into a re-fueling mission. Based on the nature of the emergency and in accordance with Air Force safety procedures, the aircrew decided to land the aircraft as soon as possible. At the time of the incident, the aircraft was too heavy to land, so the crew jettisoned 54,000 lbs. of fuel in the mountains of southern Kyrgyzstan east of Osh. The dumping occurred at an altitude of over 21,000 feet above ground level. (Note: We understand that offloading fuel at this high altitude ensures that it is vaporized before it can hit the ground. End Note.) The crew and plane returned safely to Manas. This is the first fuel dump by a Coalition aircraft since September 2005.

¶3. (C) Shortly after the incident, Base personnel informed the embassy that there had been a fuel dump, while they continued to gather information about the incident over the

weekend. According to the Base commander, the normal procedure is for an aircrew to seek the base commander's permission for the fuel dump, but this was not done in this case as the crew believed it faced a critical situation.

Kyrgyz Government Informed

¶4. (C) On June 23, the Ambassador and Base leadership informed agencies and ministries of the Kyrgyz government about the incident. Kyrgyz officials have been particularly sensitive to the issue of fuel dumping, repeatedly alleging that there has been environmental damage to crops and livestock as a result of previous dumps. In June 2007, the Kyrgyz proposed to amend the Protocol covering the Base to provide for payments for any fuel dumped, as well as compensation for any environmental damage; the U.S. side did not agree to these proposals.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador first spoke to Foreign Minister Karabayev, who did not take the news well. Karabayev was not open to the argument that science shows that fuel jettisoned at high altitudes causes no damage. Karabayev noted that in a number of previous meetings the Kyrgyz side had said we need to have a mechanism to review these types of events. He said that the U.S. side should come up with a compensation proposal -- and do so right away rather than waiting and "dragging out" the issue. He also said that, in Kyrgyzstan, even in the mountains there are people who can be badly affected by the incident.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador also spoke to Minister of Defense Kalyev, who reacted more calmly. He said that the incident

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raises a number of concerns and is an "ecological problem." He said the Kyrgyz government would take a look at the incident, and he hoped there would be a U.S. investigation into what happened. He said there should be an "ecological monitoring" of the area, and he said he was sure that everything would be done in accordance with the Base Agreement. DATT and Base personnel informed KAN (Kyrgyz Air Navigation), Ministry of Defense liaison officers, and the Kyrgyz State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry; they were generally appreciative of the information.

Relatively Calm Media Reaction

¶7. (SBU) After government officials had been informed, the Base issued a press statement on the incident the afternoon of June 23. The initial reports from the local press, which is often critical of the Base and its operations, were calm and fact-based, drawing primarily from the press statement.

¶8. (SBU) In the days following the incident, there have been a few comments in the press, distorting the facts but generally praising the Base for being open about the incident. Rossiyskaya Gazeta's June 25 Central Asian supplement covered the incident with a big photo of an air re-fueling process over a populated area and commented, "One should notice the speed of the Airbase Command in its comment on the flight incident. Let's remember that this was not the first case when American pilots dumped fuel when flying over populated Kyrgyz territories. But in previous cases, NATO commanders preferred to keep silent or limited themselves to brief after-the-fact reports."

¶9. (U) The June 25 Kyrgyz supplement to Moscow-based Argumenty i Fakty commented, "Ironically, the unpleasant incident happened right after the scandal about an alleged expansion of the Airbase. . . . To the Base commander's credit, they immediately informed Kyrgyz officials about the case, as well as about the fact that it happened over a remote mountain place. This time the Kyrgyz south was

unlucky because (the dump) happened there."

¶10. (U) The Kyrgyz insert to Moscow-based Moskovskiy Komsomolets introduced its report with the comment, "Opponents of the American Airbase got another reason to chant again, 'Yankee Go Home.' . . . No harm was done to people's health, but the Americans concealed the environmental harm. . . . Many times some politicians and public figures have tried to close the base due to the damage it does to the environment, but with no result."

¶11. (C) Comment: While the initial relatively calm, fact-based reaction in the press and from most government officials is positive, we expect the issue of fuel dumping -- and compensation for any incidents -- to continue to be on the Kyrgyz government agenda. Also, only a week ago the local papers were filled with (inaccurate) negative stories about plans to expand the Airbase, and we expect that the fuel dumping incident will continue to be discussed in the press.
YOVANOVITCH